

FEATURE ARTICLES

Feature articles appear regularly in all major newspapers and magazines. You will also see feature stories on television, usually as segments in current affairs programmes. Unlike newspaper reports, which record the events that have happened and things that have been said, a feature article analyses and comments on these events and statements. Whereas news stories are meant to be factual, objective and impersonal, feature articles deliberately use subjective and emotive language to present the writer's opinion. As a result, this sort of writing can be very controversial, and readers may sometimes find that they totally disagree with the opinions stated by the feature writer.

In feature articles that follow, look for expressions that you think are examples of emotive language. Do you think that any of these three features would be likely to provoke an angry reaction from some readers?

- **CLOSE-UP ON GENRE - FEATURE ARTICLES**

A feature article, unlike a news report, is an opinionative genre. While both these types of writing are based on facts, feature writers use their facts as a diving platform from which to launch into the presentation of their opinions. A feature article usually has a dual purpose: to inform the reader about some issue, idea or individual; and to persuade or influence attitudes, so that readers will end up sharing the writer's feelings about the subject under discussion - or will at least give the subject some serious thought.

FEATURE WRITING *** Creative Journalism

Feature writers use all the tools of fiction writing, in creating tone and mood, the development of character, plot, dialogue, narration and description. However, although it is a creative process, feature writing uses fact, not fiction.

Using freedom of style and structure, the fiction writer does not follow a set pattern, but simply applies all essential elements of good writing.

Material written for the mass media that cannot be called "news" or advertising is called feature material, and almost any topic fits the category. Usually feature articles are based on news items, offering a new dimension to the reader.

The purpose of feature articles might be to inform, persuade or even entertain so it must above all be interesting to the reader.

STYLE

The straight news story follows the inverted pyramid style ie. the most important elements in the lead, the remaining facts in decreasing order of importance, a straight-forward impersonal manner.

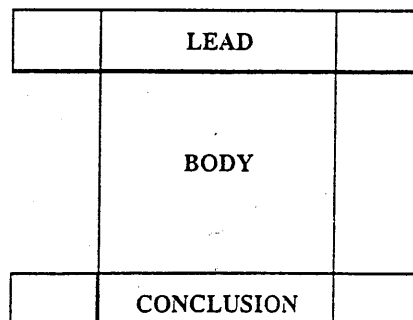
Feature writing, however, is less rigid, allowing the writer to project his own personality into the story, and developing the more human side of the news. Hence a good feature writer is identified by his individual style.

STRUCTURE

This is an important element in feature articles, and basic guidelines need to be followed.

The introduction should comprise of one-fifth of the story, the body, just over three-fifths, and the conclusion, slightly less than one fifth of the entire length.

Where the news story can be said to resemble the inverted pyramid, the feature article resembles a spool.



FEATURE ARTICLE LEADS

The purpose of the lead (introduction) in feature articles is to arouse the reader's interest and acquaint him with the general content of the article. By using an intriguing idea, a lively vocabulary, and an imaginative approach in his lead, the feature writer can successfully capture the reader's attention. The following examples, written by a journalism student, indicate a number of ways to begin a feature article.

The Serious and Thoughtful Lead

In a sense, this type of lead says to the reader, "This material should be important to you-no matter who you are". The tone of this lead is serious and thoughtful. The writer can create a sense of urgency by using short sentences.

The Problem Lead

This type of lead points to a significant problem and says, 'Something's amiss here". The problem lead is informative and often presents conflict-one of the makers of news.

The Mood Lead

Figures of speech are often used to set the mood in this type of lead, the mood lead gives the reader a feeling, of expectation, a feeling that there will be more to this story than might appear at first.

The Shock Lead

Throwing the reader off guard and then shocking him is an effective way of capturing the readers attention; however, the feature writer, in using this type of lead, should be careful not to resort to sensationalism. The reader should not be "let down" in the body of the story. The following feature is based on a report of the American Cancer Society. The humorous approach and the lightness of the tone in the first few sentences of the lead succeed in throwing the reader off guard.

The First-Person Lead

The first person lead indicates that the writer will inject himself into the story and take the reader into his confidence.

The Alliterative Lead

Alliteration, the repetition of initial consonants sounds in two or more neighbouring words or syllables in a phrase, can be used effectively in a lead. Alliteration was used by Edgar Allan Poe in his poem "The Bells".

The Historical Lead

Since the subject matter of an historical feature article may at first seem like "old news" to the reader, the writer should try to make his lead as interesting and lively as possible.

TYPES OF FEATURE STORIES

Human Interest Features: Appeals to reader's emotions, allows glimpses of the successes and predicaments of ordinary human beings. animals also fall into this category.

Autobiographical Features: Dealing with the personal experiences of the writer. (In this type of article the personal pronoun is allowable).

Personality Features: Concerning the life, interests and accomplishments of well-known or interesting persons, usually based on an interview.

How to do it: The practical steps to follow in order to do something eg. crafts, home repairs, improving your golf game, articles on diets, exercise, sewing and cooking.

Historical Features: Informative news about past events - usually written to observe holidays, birthdates of historical personages, anniversaries of important events.

Explanatory Features: The complexity of news events sometimes needs clarification or explanation. This explanation may require research or a specialised knowledge.

Colour Features: Stories that add glamour to a major event eg. the events that take place during half time at a major football game.

Interview and Speech Story Features: A political candidates speech, and the circumstances surrounding it, the hectic pace of the campaign etc.

Weather Features: Unusual weather conditions, predicted or existing, with comparative statistics eg. "The hottest recorded September day since 1926".

Humorous Features: Written humour showing an understanding of basic human nature.

Satirical Features: Newswriters use wit, irony and sarcasm to expose wrong-doing of persons in authority, in politics, or in public institutions.

IN ADDITION to those detailed above, there is a wide variety of other Features. Some include obituaries, society and women's features, personality features, and feature columns written by regular writers.

Commonsense Can Solve All Our Problems

Kavanagh
on Monday

So far in life I've found that a commonsense approach will clear just about every hurdle in a workaday world.....

Ordinary people like me who grew up in a bush town learned commonsense the hard way, like sticking our fingers on the hot stove too many times. It's amazing how quickly you learn the many benefits of not sticking your finger on a hot stove; relief from pain is one.

Well, there are a couple of rather big problems facing Australia today where I feel commonsense has not had a look in. They both involve unemployment.

Remember, years ago, experts predicting a time when computers would take over the workplace, freeing the workers to spend our wages and vastly extended leisure hours on pleasure? They weren't called computers, though. They were robots working in something called automation.

But the image was terrific, so good that no one believed it. No one I know could see themselves being replaced by a robot that couldn't think for itself or move freely, tied as it was by electric wires to a power point. Certainly, very few people were concerned enough to look further and ask who would pay them once a robot took their job.

It was silly, it couldn't happen, and anyway, could you imagine any government worth its salt hurling its citizens into a jobless void for the sake of the extra profits a robot might bring?

Of course, we can't blame our 1.1 million unemployed entirely on the computer invasion but it certainly is responsible for many deserving Australians being doomed never to work again.

On the other hand, computers have changed humanity for the better in many areas—medicine to name just one.

But if we applied commonsense to the computer revolution, which is only on the edge of its potential, surely we could come

up with labour-intensive areas where the monetary savings of a computer would be far outweighed by the sanctity of one of the most basic human rights, the right to be paid for our skills, our efforts, our labour.

Killing off jobs is socially immoral, an infringement of human rights and a great incentive for crime and violence where it hurts the community most, in the suburbs.

Yet electronic robots continued to gobble up flesh-and-blood jobs and human dignity without protests, from the most feeble-minded rent-a-crowd misfit right up to the Prime Minister...

It just doesn't make sense. Governments throw billions away in all manner of outside aid and poor investments while pinching pennies in areas that could save whole communities.

What made less sense was last week's staggering statistic showing Australia imported food worth \$2 billion last year. Included were fresh fruit and vegetables worth \$470 million and \$114 million worth came from New Zealand.

Can you see commonsense in importing \$2 billion worth of food while our government is paying 1.1 million Australians to sit around on fertile ground doing nothing? Lord love-a-duck!

Naturally, there will be some damn good academic reasons ... balance of trade, diplomacy, off-season gaps, tariffs.

But commonsense? Australia really has its fingers on a red-hot stove and doesn't feel a bloody thing.

You can help relieve the pain by buying Australian products exclusively and an association named AusBuy has made it easy by listing dinkum Aussie made products. The AusBuy Guide is available at most Ampol Service stations or through AusBuy, PO Box 440, Rydalmere, NSW 2116. So buy Aussie. It's commonsense.

from The Brisbane Courier-Mail, 22 March 1993

WRITING A FEATURE ARTICLE

HEADLINE:

The headline needs to gain the reader's attention. It also needs to inform the reader about what topic the article is going to be about. As with your advertisement, you need to consider what type of writing you will use as well as size of the font and what colours you will use. The headline needs to be brief as a reader is normally detracted by too many words.

e.g. "CAMPS FOR THE FAMILY IN SUMMER" compared to "FAMILY SUMMER CAMPS"

INTRODUCTION:

In an introduction there are two main points that you need to keep in mind. They are :

1. To tell the reader what the article is about.
2. To gain the reader's attention by using exciting language or causing intrigue about the issue or person the article is about.

A reader is not going to read your article completely unless you gain their attention within the first paragraph of your article.

BODY:

In the next couple of paragraphs you need to have given a background to the event or the achievements of the person interviewed or so forth. The reader needs to be able to see the significance of the article; why is the article being written? Why is the event/person/subject important enough or relevant to the readers of your magazine? Where is the event being held? What does the event offer to the reader? How can the events the person being interviewed has experienced be relevant to the reader? What has happened to the interviewee?

Also, you may wish to talk about other people's opinions. A quote from an onlooker could give your article more authority by having someone justify your own opinion. Readers may become reassured by certain facts you include in your article such as the qualifications of the people you are quoting. Why is their opinion relevant to the article?

As the writer of the article you need to decide what is relevant and therefore important to the reader. You need to always keep in mind who you are targeting the article to. The reader needs to be able to relate to the information being conveyed or else they will not read it. Remember that in the body of your feature article you will need to have answered all the usual questions of Who? What? When? Where? and Why? so that at the end of the article the reader is not left asking questions.

CONCLUSION:

If your article is meant to be an informative piece perhaps a contact address and phone number should be included. Otherwise, you need to review your article and ensure that the reader is aware and perhaps, persuaded by your opinion.

BE SURE TO KEEP IN MIND:

The balance between description and comment. Have you ensured that there is enough information as well as opinion in the article to give your piece power and authorisation? Have you ended your article competently and confidently? Has it summed up the whole purpose for the article? Is there any questions that the 'average' reader would ask that you have not answered?

FEATURE ARTICLES

Definition:

A feature is usually an article which concentrates on or displays a personality, a place, or a subject of general interest.

Presenting an issue

Feature articles in newspapers and magazines usually concentrate on an individual or an issue, which is then presented with a particular focus in mind. This focus can be an opinion, a viewpoint or an emotional pull which informs the writer's attitude to the subject. Take for example: these typically deal with famous people, family life, personal experience, or memories of childhood. In this way, feature articles differ from news reports, which are generally unbiased and factual. Here are some common differences between the two forms of writing.

News reports

As brief as possible.
Giving the facts.
Hardly ever using the word 'I'.
Written in the past tense.
Written objectively (without bias).
Giving no opinion.
Rarely using emotive language.
Presenting facts.
To inform.

Feature articles

More expansive.
Providing a background to the facts.
Sometimes referring to the writer.
Adopting different tenses.
Written subjectively.
Offering a personal response.
Often using emotive language.
Using facts to present an opinion.
To inform and entertain or persuade.

Feature articles

Newspapers and magazines contain a wide range of feature articles. The word 'feature' suggests the main concern of the article, i.e. to focus on a single issue or personality. Feature articles may comment in depth on a current issue reported in the news; other subjects may be an issue of social importance or any general issue such as sport, fashion, travel, gossip about a well-known personality, history or health. Feature articles aim to inform, entertain and persuade. They are often highly subjective and controversial.

Features

Stylistic features of this text type include:

- striking headlines to engage the reader
- background information found in the opening paragraph which outlines the issue
- 'tear-out' section (a section from the article in large print giving the key points of the article)
- graphics with story appeal
- emotive language to achieve the writer's persuasive purpose
- colourful language
- selective use of facts to persuade and entertain
- clear line of argument or opinion
- variation of sentence length to avoid monotony in structure
- use of first person to involve reader and win their support
- short paragraphs
- sub-headings
- narrow column format
- writer's name or byline
- publication details.

Feature articles are extended articles in newspapers or magazines. They differ from other articles in this way:

- most articles in a newspaper or magazine report very recent events or new information
- feature articles usually explore in some detail issues or events of current importance, or those which the writer believes are important.

Most articles:

- deal with *very recent* events
- report information.

Feature articles on the other hand:

- explore events and issues
- deal with events or issues of current importance but which may not be 'news' in the normal sense
- often offer an opinion or point of view on the issue.

Many feature articles are often written to be provocative and/or thought-provoking.

How feature articles encourage readers to accept a viewpoint

Sometimes the expression of opinion is offered directly and is quite obvious. In other articles the writer's position, opinions and views emerge more indirectly, through the

- selection of information
- language used.
- structure of the article

In these cases the reader is usually led towards sharing the writer's views rather than being directly presented with them. Sometimes the views may emerge even more indirectly through the use of satire or parody.

writer's name

What a gas!

eye-catching headlines—bold print, exclamation and use of a colloquialism

Andre (or is it Andy?) leaves fans delirious

From GERARD WRIGHT

trendy image established—love of life in the fast lane

ROCK'N'ROLL, no-speed-limits, no-apologies tennis returned to centre court at the Australian Open yesterday, with the Andre Agassi Show continuing to take its box office success.

Rusedski's big shot is the equal fastest serve in men's tennis last year, 218km/h, with Goran Ivanisevic. He regularly served at more than 200km/h yesterday, including one blast timed at 210km/h, the fastest at the Open so far.

brackets personalise the sub-heading

opening paragraph presents main idea of article

In three rounds so far, Agassi hasn't been confronted with opponents so much as presented with straight men for his act. The latest, Canadian left-hander Greg Rusedski, was expected to provide stronger opposition than the world No. 2 has met so far.

This only served to provide a showcase for his opponent's hair-trigger reflexes. There were times when the ball moved too fast for the human eye to follow: 204km/h from Rusedski's racquet, at least as fast again from Agassi's as it streaked down the sideline.

dramatisation to make events seem exciting—creates a subjective tone

specialised vocabulary familiar to tennis followers

Instead, it was yet another straight-sets rout—6-2 6-4 6-2 in 1hr 22 min—for which he makes no apologies. "Jeez, if I can keep these guys from not getting a set, I'll play 10 matches here, I'll keep them coming," Agassi said.

The Canadian did not help his case with a string of unforced errors, and eight foot-faults, including six in the first set.

quote from Agassi gives article a sense of immediacy

The Melbourne public would be happy with that idea. So far they have warmed to his tennis rather than his dress sense but, baggy shorts, shaved legs, bandana and all, they are beginning to accept the whole package.

There were times, too, when Agassi did his best to obliterate what was left of his opponent's confidence, standing in the middle of the baseline and walking from one shot to the next as he ran Rusedski from one side of the court to the other during one rally.

vivid verb

colloquial language

Along with the usual wolf whistles as he changed shirts during the second set came a call from a female member of the centre court crowd: "Keep going." He has also acquired a nickname. "C'mon Andy".

One of Agassi's many t-shirts has a message on it: This IS Work. Nobody can make it look easier than he can.

personal opinion

writer's opinion

Andre with his shirt off isn't all that exciting. Shirt on and racquet in hand, he is an entirely different proposition.

With a trouble-free fun so far, Agassi has felt relaxed enough to organise a bet with ATP media services manager Greg Sharcko on the outcome of last night's centre court match between Australia's Pat Rafter and Marcos Ondruska of South Africa.

exaggeration to give a pro-Agassi bias

The top players usually have one big shot, known as a weapon. Some have several. Agassi has an arsenal. During the first set he beat Rusedski with passing shots, two lobs carried perfectly by the swirling breeze and a drop volley.

Agassi had \$5 on the South African, with double stakes for a straight-sets or five-sets win.

In his first Australian Open appearance after 10 years as a pro, including a withdrawal last

year because of surgery to his right wrist, Agassi admits he regrets not playing in the event sooner.

"In the past, I don't think the priorities really were such that I felt that it was more important to come here than it was to have a little time off to enjoy my holidays," he said. "In a sense, I kick myself, because I wish I'd felt this way earlier."

Agassi won last year's US Open as the first unseeded player to triumph since Fred Stolle in 1966. His odds to win that tournament were 20-1. In Melbourne, he is 5-2. "It's worth a few bucks, I think."

The tournament favourite is reigning champion and world No 1 Pete Sampras, whose coach Tim Gullikson, collapsed at Flinders Park and was admitted to

hospital on Friday.

Agassi offered his own personalised message to his rival's coach during yesterday's centre court appearance. Attached to his racquet bag was a sign: GULLY. GET WELL SOON.

"It was for support, needless to say, but also to make him hopefully feel a little better as he tries to recover," Agassi said.

"He's a good man and we all like him very much and we're all praying for him and pulling for him. I just felt like doing it." Not all of Flinders Park was bathed in such sweetness and light.

The hostility that tends to smoulder between Austrian Thomas Muster and most of his opponents glowed red-hot before, during and after his match with Jacco Eltingh of the Netherlands.

Sun-Herald, 22 January 1995

narrow column
format

precise adjective

short paragraphs

quote personalises
the article

colourful,
imaginative
language

publication details



Study the sports feature article from the *Sun-Herald* and answer the following questions:

- a Do the headlines engage the reader's attention?
- b What is the focus of the article?
- c How effective is the opening paragraph in outlining the main idea in the article?
- d Does the article contain a line of argument or opinion? Summarise it.
- e Find two examples of emotional language and comment on their effectiveness.
- f Give an example of colourful, imaginative language. Is it effective?
- g Does the writer's use of sentence length help to keep the reader's interest?
- h What facts are given in the article? Have they been presented objectively or subjectively?
- i Is this a successful example of sports journalism? Explain.

Conventions of feature articles

Feature articles often draw on and use:

- incidents
- examples
- comments by other people which illustrate or support the views being put forward.

Headlines

- are often somewhat cryptic, encouraging the reader to read on
- sometimes involve a play on words.

Sub-headers

- usually provide a summary or explanation of the main thesis of the article.

Introductions

- are often thought-provoking
- may rely on illustrative examples.

Development

Most articles usually build towards their main point gradually, beginning with an incident which raises an issue and then moving towards exploring that issue.

Boxes

The main ideas or key phrases may be repeated in boxed quotes or as sub-headings throughout the article.

Conclusions

- often re-iterate directly, or through example, the main point
- may employ rhetorical or real questions
- may leave food for thought.

All newspapers and magazines have what we call feature articles. These are more like essays than news stories. But they definitely don't look like the essays you write in school. They are not designed to show how much the writer knows about a subject, but intended to be entertaining and informative. Since they are aimed at the general reading public, the writers make a much stronger attempt to get the reader interested than you would find the average essay writer doing. How do feature writers make a topic interesting? Four tricks commonly used are strong openings, illustrations and lots of detail, quotations and visual aids.

Strong openings

Dramatising a subject, using a shocking quotation or statistic, or challenging the reader in some powerful way — all these are useful openers. What is the following writer doing?

Illustration and lots of detail

Readers of feature articles will not put up with lots of generalisations or boring academic discussion of a topic for very long. They want detail. What form can this take? It is common to use case studies (accounts of real people involved in situations relevant to the topic), statistics, examples from the writer's own experience or people the writer has spoken to — anything to give the subject a down-to-earth, true-life feel. In the following example, what is the writer doing?

Without lots of detail to illustrate the general points the writer is making, the reader will lose interest very fast.

Detail does not have to mean anecdotes. It can mean data of any kind. Often, statistics are a great way of sketching in the subject. Here is an example.

Forever single

Australians are marrying later and many not at all. If you were born in the 1960s, there is a 25% chance you will never wed. SUSAN WILLIAMS reports on what being single for ever means ...

Quotations

As with other forms of journalism, interviewing people, and selectively quoting things they say about the subject, is essential. Here is an example.

Visual aids

Visual aids are pictures, diagrams and tables. Virtually all longer feature articles have illustration of some kind. This may be a photograph of the person or subject involved, a diagram (particularly if it is a technical subject) or some other form of illustration — a graph, table or other type of visual information. Don't forget that words are not the only way of getting information across. A good feature article should have pictures, if possible, as well as words.

.....Activity

Reading a feature article

Read the feature article below with the following focus questions in mind:

- What issue or topic does the article deal with?
- What opinions or attitudes towards the topic does it encourage the reader to adopt?

After reading, write your answers to the focus questions.

Pet FEAR

We are a nation of dog lovers, but after two recent fatal attacks authorities are clamping down on aggressive breeds. **Elisabeth Wynhausen** reports.

Sometimes it sounds as if they are talking about Cerberus, the demon dog. With American pit bull-terriers blamed for a series of attacks in Sydney last week, the State Government promised measures to protect the public from further attacks. In Queensland, where an elderly woman was mauled to death by a pit bull terrier only last month, several councils have declared all pit bulls to be dangerous.

Banned in the United Kingdom, and in some American States, these animals have long received a bad press. But whatever possible reasons anyone may have for owning a dog regularly likened to a crocodile, the motives have come in for particular scrutiny since 79-year-old Toowoomba widow, Barbara Stringer, was attacked and killed by a pit bull last month.

It was the second fatal dog attack within six months. Last winter, an 85-year-old Perth woman, Perina Chokolich, was mauled to death by a pack of marauding dogs. Giovanni Pacino, whose Rottweilers and German shepherd crosses are alleged to have attacked Chokolich, was charged with her manslaughter in Perth magistrates courts on January 12. He goes back to court today.

Describing it as the first such case in the State, West Australian police have suggested that it will set a precedent. Whatever its outcome, the case is one sign that the authorities are more often forced to grapple with the growing menace from savage dogs.

The trouble is that Australians like their dogs. And if Dr Rob Zammit, the veterinarian vice-president of the NSW Canine Council is any guide, we like them more than most. 'Australia has more

dogs per capita than any country,' he contends, quoting a survey by the Urban Animal Management Group. Instead of the adorable King Charles spaniels and the standard poodles that used to rank as fashionable accoutrements, however, many opt for the canine equivalent of a rocket launcher or an armour-plated tank.

With people more conscious than ever of crime, they may feel safer with a dog with a fearsome reputation. And some believe they look tougher with a tough-looking dog to complete the picture. Brisbane city councillor David Hinchliffe claims that owners of American pit bull terriers are often as 'aggressive and antisocial' as the dogs themselves.

Few people had even heard of American pit bull terriers before the 1980s. At that time they were publicised as the dogs that complemented the image of Los Angeles street gangs.

'With younger men it's a macho type thing,' says Debra Gould, president the Rottweiler Club 'They get around in the utes with the dogs with the studded collars, especially the bull-terriers.' Gould herself owns five Rottweilers—Rotties, as the aficionados call them. 'They're all normal,' she says.

People who breed and show dogs insist that it isn't a particular sort of dog but a particular sort of owner who causes a problem, getting a breed of dog rumoured to be savage, then leaving it chained up, or failing to exercise it properly, so the animal, half-crazy with boredom, becomes intensely possessive of its tiny patch of yard. 'Any dog will become aggressive if treated wrongly,' says Inge Craik, a member of the Doberman Club. 'In most cases, in my opinion, it's human error, not dog error.'

Certainly there's been some human error in the figures that get bandied about. The many articles about savage dogs often mention an unsourced study showing that some 30 000 Australians are admitted to hospital for treatments for dog bites each year.

This awe-inspiring statistic is about 16 times too high: figures from the National Injury Surveillance Unit based on hospital admissions suggest that fewer than 2000 were admitted to hospital because of dog bites in a year. But a quarter of them were under four years of age.

Whether or not the owners are to be blamed, there seems to be little doubt that pit bull terriers, German shepherds, Dobermans, Rottweilers and blue heelers are more likely to attack than other breeds. Though they constitute an estimated fifth of the canine populations, according to the South Australian Injury Surveillance Unit they're involved in three-quarters of the attacks.

But none of the other notorious breeds, not even the bull-terriers or the Staffordshire, with which the pit bull is so often confused, has the vice-like jaws and lethal tenacity of the pit bull.

Brisbane Councillor David Hinchliffe likes to quote from a study showing that while American pit bulls make up only about 1 per cent of the canine population of the United States, they were blamed for 40 per cent of the 100 or so fatal attacks by dogs over five years.

Mention of the study provokes Pit Bull Association spokesman Dr Steven Collier to question its methodology. This isn't what one expects to hear from someone defending pit bulls. But Collier, who lectures in archaeology at the University of New England, fails to fit the stereotype of the typical pit bull terrier owner. He doesn't even own a pit bull. Instead he has a golden retriever and a Bedlington terrier. He already had the retriever when he discovered pit bulls, dogs even he will admit 'can be aggressive to other dogs'.

But if there's another fault to 'pits', as he calls them, he hasn't noticed. '... Any breed you care to name—including, in America, a Yorkshire terrier—has killed a person,' he says. Why then do the pits get such a bad rap?

'Humane societies, like the RSPCA in this country, hate these dogs with a passion because they're used in dog fighting,' he says. Where other people say animals that are fighting machines have no place in human society, Collier, though no dog fight fan himself, expresses unreserved admiration for a dog bred to be so game that, according to a report about a fight in the US, it can battle on for five hours.

Whatever that may say about people who get their thrills watching dogs tear out each other's throats, in this country, as far as RSPCA officials are aware, there have been no prosecutions of the organisers of dog fights. Though Byron Hall,

senior inspector for the Queensland RSPCA, has not seen a fight except on video from the UK, he says from what he's heard, the fights are often staged in the backs of big trucks. The year before last, he says, the RSPCA passed on information about dog fights to the police when it appeared that the sale of guns and drugs were also involved.

The Australian Government banned the importation of pit bulls in September 1991, after a child of two months was mauled and killed. Since Stringer's death last month, several councils in Queensland have brought in tougher measures some believe to be a prelude to a complete ban. In Brisbane, the restrictions on dogs that have been declared dangerous will apply to all American pit bull terriers and pit bull crossbreeds.

There is no doubt some of the crossbreeds are a frightening sight. Allen Callaghan, the general manager of the Queensland RSPCA, says American pit bulls have been crossed with dogs such as bull mastiffs and even Great Danes. 'They look like the hound of the Baskervilles,' he says.

Some councils now limit the number of dogs to two on a suburban block, or on a property smaller than 2 ha. Meanwhile the provisions that deal with dangerous dogs have been tightened up by the South Australian Government's Dog and Cat Management Act, legislation of a kind to be introduced in Victoria and in the works in NSW, where Local Government Minister Ernie Page is considering submissions on everything from cat curfews to bans on some breeds of dogs. Before banning any breed they'll have to identify them first. Many dogs aren't registered and least likely of all to be registered is the American pit bull.

'We've only got one pit bull registered,' says councillor Phil Connole from Toowoomba. The animal that attacked Mrs Stringer, and was subsequently put down was registered as a Labrador cross, he says. His council, which has just decided to prosecute the dog's registered owner, was already contemplating instituting much tougher fines against people whose dogs injure others or are permitted to worry them. 'But no matter how much legislation State or local governments pass,' says Connole, 'the ultimate responsibility still rests with pet owners.'

No doubt the most effective measure of all would be sterilisation of all canine companions (unless they belong to registered breeders, of course). But that fails to appeal to the types who feel their macho image is improved by the addition of a ferocious mutt. Veterinary nurse Denise Blackett says that when anxious-looking men used to come to have their dogs desexed, she would reassure them 'don't worry, we're only doing the dog'. Blackett had seen the ultimate answer to the image problem in a veterinary magazine. 'In America you can buy silicone implants so you can have your dog castrated and no one will know ...'

Sample feature article

The feature article below appeared in the environment supplement of *The West Australian* newspaper. It might provide a useful model for your assignment.

The panda remains on the brink of extinction, despite its international popularity. MICHAEL PELUSEY reports on the dangers it faces and the measures being taken to save it.



Pandas in peril

The headline is dramatic and eye-catching because it uses alliteration.

The sub-heading gives a brief description of what the article is about.

A photograph is used to add visual appeal but also to support the main point of the article - pandas need our help.



The article begins with a description of a specific incident.

The main point of the article is expressed in this paragraph.

This paragraph is the first of a number providing background information about the panda and the reasons for the problems it faces.

At this point the article moves on to describe the attempts to help the panda.

In 1869, French missionary and naturalist Pere Armand David gave the world outside China its first description of a giant panda. In 1936, the first live panda left its homeland for the United States, a guest of Chicago Zoo.

Since then, the world has had a passionate love affair with this irresistible animal.

But sadly, the panda is now on the verge of extinction. It is estimated that no more than 1000 survive in the wild. With only 100 in zoos worldwide, the species' survival is uncertain.

Giant pandas and their smaller cousin, the lesser panda, are believed to be related to bears but scientists are uncertain.

Pandas are unique to China. In the past, they inhabited vast tracts of temperate forest in southern and central China. Today their range has diminished, to a few isolated pockets in Sichuan, Gansu and Shaanxi provinces.

Habitat destruction is the main reason for the drastic drop in numbers. Uncontrolled logging and farming have forced pandas into pockets of remnant forest, in effect trapping them on islands of forest in a sea of farms.

Intermixing of populations from different areas is almost impossible, resulting in inbreeding. Even reserves put aside to protect panda habitat rarely support more than a dozen or so animals.

Pandas normally give birth to only one cub at a time, with at least two years between births. If there are twins, one is left to die.

Adding to the pandas' woes is poaching. Pelts fetch more than \$10 000 in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, and some locals find the lure irresistible.

Penalties for poaching have become progressively more severe—two men have been publicly executed after being caught with panda skins.

In further measures to save the panda, 13 reserves have been set aside. The 2000 sq km Wolong reserve in Sichuan province is the biggest, with more than 130 pandas.

In 1980, the Chinese government invited outside help. The World Wildlife Fund and Chinese scientists became involved in a joint program to find ways of saving pandas from extinction.

Wolong Reserve, where most of the research takes place, is mountainous and heavily wooded. The panda's secretive habits and the unforgiving terrain make the animals hard to spot.

Research techniques include analysing panda droppings to find out vital dietary information.

Another involves attaching a collar containing a miniature radio transmitter to a panda. Scientists can then track the animal's movements.

The giant panda can weigh in at more than 100 kg and is a solitary animal which is most active at dawn and dusk.

Giant pandas' preferred food, bamboo, is nutritionally poor. To survive, they spend more than 16 hours a day eating up to 20 kg of bamboo.

They have no need to hibernate because bamboo is abundant and does not die off during the heavy snows of winter.

However, sometimes great areas die after flowering. Previously, pandas probably just moved to another area to find unaffected bamboo. Today, with populations isolated by human land use, they have nowhere to go.

During 1975, in the provinces of Sichuan and Gansu, huge tracts of bamboo died off, resulting in an estimated 138 pandas starving to death.

Another near disastrous bamboo die-back occurred in 1983. Feeding stations were set up and captured animals force-fed. On that occasion only 14 died.

Scientists are trying to find ways of reducing the effects of bamboo die-back, which has the potential to wipe out pandas in the wild.

Some scientists believe that planting other species will provide a continuous supply of food.

Others suggest planting corridors of bamboo connecting reserves and habitats which would enable pandas to migrate to unaffected areas.

But it has become obvious that panda habitats need protection. With that in mind, the existing reserves will be expanded and 14 more created.

Farmers and loggers will be paid to leave and tree felling and hunting will be banned in these regions. In addition, peasants will be offered substantial rewards if they save a starving panda.

Saving pandas costs money so China has instigated a policy of leasing the animals to overseas zoos. Recently, for example, California's San Diego Zoo acquired a pair of pandas on a 10-year lease.

These pandas attract big crowds so gate takings will compensate for the cost, which runs into millions of dollars.

Pandas are notoriously difficult to breed in captivity. Most recent successes have been due to artificial insemination but this is unreliable. Because the female is on heat only a few days a year, frozen sperm must be kept ready.

Rearing the young born in captivity has also proved difficult, with only a third of offspring surviving beyond one month.

Many people argue—with some justification—that appealing animals such as pandas get preferential treatment over other less endearing endangered species. However, reserves put aside for pandas also protect a wide range of other wildlife such as the golden monkey, musk deer and snow leopard.

Without the mass appeal of animals such as the panda, many other species would be doomed to extinction. Perhaps that is why the World Wildlife Fund chose the panda for its symbol.

Here the article moves on to describe the difficulties still faced.

The article concludes by explaining why it is worthwhile to help the panda.

MODEL OF A FEATURE ARTICLE

Generic structure

- 1 a visually eye-catching headline
- 2 the writer's name
- 3 background information about the subject
- 4 presentation of personal opinion
- 5 specific examples or incidents are given to illustrate the general points under discussion
- 6 people with first-hand knowledge or experience or the subject are often quoted
- 7 some conclusion is reached

Cohesive ties

- 1 conjunction link sentences and paragraphs
- 2 adverbs and short phrases that indicate time sequences also provide links
- 3 many feature writers use frequent repetition of key phrases as a linking device (as in the Lawrie Kavanagh article)

Vocabulary

- 1 includes many words that relate to the specific subject discussed-in this article, examples include such term as 'driftnets', 'long-lining method' and 'purse seine'
- 2 makes use of an extensive written vocabulary
- 3 some features use contractions to create a chatty, person-to-person tone (see the ~~Kavanagh and Simone Green articles~~)
- 4 emotive language is commonly used

Grammar

- 1 third-person narrative is most common, but is mixed with first-person comment. If the article is actually a feature column by a regular columnist (like the Kavanagh example) then first-person comment may predominate
- 2 readers are involved and spoken to directly through the use of second-person address
- 3 present and past tenses are intermixed
- 4 sentence length is varied to avoid monotony in structure-ranging from short and simple to long and complex

Paragraphing and punctuation

- 1 conventional paragraphs are used, usually all of similar length. In general, features in newspapers use short paragraphs of 1-3 sentences long, or much longer (see the Green article)
- 2 inverted commas indicate the use of direct quotations (see the Green article)
- 3 inverted commas indicate the use of direct quotations (see the article 'Taylor Made')

Spelling and letter pattern

- 1 standard spelling
- 2 printed format, never hand-written

Layout

- 1 a visually striking headline
- 2 several types and sizes of fonts
- 3 narrow-column format
- 4 writer's name shown (sometimes signature and photo, if the writer is a regular columnist)
- 5 magazine features usually include a number of photos (some newspapers use photos too)

EDITOR'S GUIDE

1 Who wrote the article? _____

2 Who was his/her intended audience? _____

3 Do you think the piece appeals to that audience? _____

4 What responses does the writer hope for? _____

5 In your opinion, has the writer included enough information and presented his/her idea well enough to get that response? _____ Explain: _____

6 Did the first few sentences attract your attention? _____

Explain: _____

7 Was the writer's message easy to follow and understand? _____

8 Does the article end with a feeling or idea that leaves the reader with something to think about or make the reader glad that he/she has spent time reading the piece? _____

9 Underline the words or phrases in the article that could have been left out without changing any meanings.

10 Circle any overworked words or phrases.

11 Count the number of sentences that begin with "There" or "It".

12 Rewrite one of the sentences here _____

13 Find the longest or most complicated sentence in the article. Rewrite the same thought here in shorter sentences. _____

14 Did you like the writer's style? _____

Would you have chosen to read this article even if your teacher had not required it? _____

15 Why or why not? _____